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Transliteration Table

Consonants,

ا	'	د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	'	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

Short:	ا	a	ي	i	و	u
Long:	آ	ā	يِ	ī	وِ	ū
diphthongs:			أَي	ay	أَو	aw

Foreword

All praise is due to Almighty God, Allāh. We praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. And we seek refuge in Allāh from the evil of our own selves and from our wicked deeds. Whoever has been guided by Allāh, there is none to misguide him; and whoever has been misguided by Allāh, none can guide him. I bear witness that there is no other god worthy of worship except Allāh, alone, without partner or associate. And I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger. May Allāh, the Exalted, bestow His peace and blessings upon Prophet Muḥammad, upon his good and pure family, as well as upon all of the noble companions, and upon those who follow them in righteousness until the Day of Reckoning.

Verily, the most truthful speech is the Book of Allāh, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muḥammad (ﷺ); while the worst affairs are novelties, for every novelty is a (blameworthy) innovation. Every innovation [in matters of religion] is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Fire.*

The subject of this treatise - the nature, essence and circumstances of the human soul - is fascinating to people of all ages, faiths and walks of life. Personally, I have always been keenly interested in understanding the mysteries of the human soul. After embracing Islām, my desire to know the truth regarding the soul grew even stronger.

In order to fulfill this desire, I read extensively in this area from ancient texts as well as from the works of modern writers

* This introductory address constitutes a portion of "*Khuṭbat al-Hājah*," a standard form of opening address used by the Prophet (ﷺ) on certain occasions of import, such as the Friday sermon, the marriage ceremony, etc. A detailed collection of various authentic narrations of this speech can be found in al-Albānī's treatise, *Khuṭbat al-Hājah*.

- Islāmic and otherwise. Because of the nature of this exciting topic, one who researches this subject is faced with an enormous amount of conflicting information. Therefore, in order to arrive at sound, dependable conclusions regarding the soul, one must carefully read and analyse the available material and evaluate it according to stringent criteria. This is of utmost importance since it bears directly on one's *'aqidah* (belief and conviction in matters of faith).

During extensive reading and research, I became convinced that Islām, the only fully preserved, divinely revealed faith, had the true answers to man's many questions about the human soul. This conviction compelled me to write a treatise on this most strange and mysterious entity. I hope it will provide beneficial and thought-provoking information for the reader, regardless of his present spiritual inclination.

Throughout this research, I depended upon the glorious Qur'ān since it is the perfectly preserved and unadulterated word of Allāh. Furthermore, I referred to only those prophetic traditions critically assessed to be authentically related and, as such, dependable sources for the subject at hand. Finally, I carefully sifted through the many conflicting views of the scholars who have written in this area and chose only those which are in consonance with the divinely revealed *Shari'ah* and with sound logic and reasoning.

I trust that what is contained herein will benefit the reader and will have a profound effect on his own thought, faith and way of life. I implore Allāh, the Beneficent and Merciful, to accept this as a work done for His sake alone and to make it a treasure for me on "the Day [of resurrection and judgement] when neither wealth nor sons will benefit [one] except he who comes before Allāh with a sound heart."*

Abū Bilal Muṣṭafā al-Kanadi
Makkah al-Mukarramah
Ramaḍān 1407 A.H./May 1987

*True in faith in the one and only Almighty God and sincere in submission to His sacred law. The Qur'ānic quotation is Sūrah *al-Shu'ara'*, 26:88-89.

The Nature and Essence of the Human Soul

Scholars of various schools of thoughts¹ differ greatly regarding the nature and essence of the soul (*nafs*). Is it a part of the physical body or a non-essential characteristic² of it? Is it an entity consigned to dwell within the physical body, or is it an independent essence in itself? Is the *nafs* the same as the *rūh* (spirit)? Finally, what happens to the soul upon death? Is it confined to its body and its grave? If not, is it free to move about in the unseen spiritual world and on the earth?³

Regarding this subject, leading theologians of various sects have put forward a host of conflicting opinions. It would be beyond the scope of the present work to examine each and every view put forward by the various scholars; however, a brief mention of some of their opinions regarding this issue is necessary. The correct

¹ Not the four famous schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) but rather leading scholars and thinkers who represent various unorthodox sects, such as the Mu'tazilites, Rāfidhites and philosophers. They have expressed various incorrect views and opinions on this and other subjects of *'aqidah*.

² In Arabic, *'aradh*. According to the terminology of the philosophers, it refers to things which cannot exist independently, like colour, smell, length, etc.

³ See *Kitāb al-Rūh*, p. 272.

view⁴ is given, supported by sound reason and statements from the Qur'ān and the authentic sunnah.

Various Incorrect Theories

According to the theologian, Abul-Hasan al-Ash'ari, scholars differed regarding the *rūḥ* (spirit), *nafs* (soul) and *ḥayāh* (life force). Al-Nadhdhām, one of the leaders of the Mu'tazilah,⁵ is attributed with having said that the *nafs* is the form of the *rūḥ*. He further claimed that the *rūḥ* is alive (i.e., animate) and exists independently. In contrast to his view, other scholars alleged that the *rūḥ* is a non-essential characteristic of the human being, unable to exist independently of itself. Still others opposed both of these views and claimed that it is not known what the *rūḥ* is - an essential characteristic or a non-essential characteristic.

The proponents of another theory claimed that man consists of a particular form contained within a physical body; however, they

⁴ It is "correct" in the sense that it is not contrary to the beliefs of *ahl al-sunnah*, literally, "the people of the established way or path" (those who sincerely and firmly adhere to the Qur'ān and the authentic sunnah as their complete way of life). Indeed, there is little authentic information about the *ruh*. Referring to the *ruh* Allāh says in the Qur'ān: وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا "And you have not been given knowledge except for a little." Sūrah *al-Isra'*, 17:85. (ed.)

⁵ A misguided sect which introduced speculative dogmatics into Islām. This school of thought is characterised by a slanted, so-called "rationalistic" approach to matters of faith. They interpret clear texts of the *shari'ah* - those from the Qur'ān and the sunnah - in such a manner as to coincide with their preconceived notions based on what they termed "sense." Ibn al-Qayyim has aptly refuted their views and those of others who have been influenced by philosophical thought foreign to Islām. Whoever wishes to delve deeper into this aspect is referred to his celebrated treatise, *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*, pp. 266-293, where he meticulously details his refutation with logic and reasoning.

differed as to precisely what this form is. One group maintained that the form consists of four ingredients⁶ from which the physical body originates and further develops. A second opinion was that it represents pure blood, free of impurities and contamination. Another view claimed that this form is the animate life in man, the sensual heat which pervades the body. And a fourth group proposed that the form is an essential element which causes all animate, living beings to function in a particular manner⁷ yet is not separated from such beings and does not have a different structure. Although there are other opinions⁸ defining this form within the physical body, the four previously mentioned views are a sufficient sample.

The Correct View

What is considered as the most accurate view regarding the *nafs* and the *rūḥ* is that of Ibn al-Qayyim⁹ which is affirmed by Ibn Abul-'Izz al-Hanafi in his commentary on *al-'Aqīdat al-Taḥāwīyyah*.¹⁰ They base their position on various verses of the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet (ﷺ) as well as on sound logic and rational thought. According to them, man consists of a spirit and a body together. The spirit is an entity which differs from the physical, tangible body. It is a higher type of luminous

⁶ There is a philosophical view which claims that the human body originates from earth, air, fire and water. However, as mentioned in the Qur'ān and the authentic sunnah, man originates from clay (i.e., earth).

⁷ See al-Ghazālī's treatise on the soul, *Ma'ārij al-Qudsfee Madārij Ma'ārifat al-Nafs*, pp. 27-35.

⁸ Mentioned and refuted by Ibn Taymīyyah in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 3, pp. 30-35 and vol. 9, pp. 279-302.

⁹ See his famous treatise dealing with the circumstances of the soul of the living and the dead, *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*, pp. 249-250.

¹⁰ see pp. 443-444.

the inhabitants of the heavens say, A good soul has come from the earth. Allāh has blessed you and the body which you used to occupy.”²²

The Arabic expression “*ḳunti ta’ murīnah*” (“you used to occupy”) suggests that the soul inhabited the body, filling and possessing the whole of it. The soul’s dwelling within the body and departure from it clearly confirms the soul’s own entity.

²² Authentically related by Muslim.

The *Nafs* and the *Rūḥ*

An extremely important and highly reasonable question often posed regarding the terms “*nafs*” and “*rūḥ*” is: “Do these terms signify one and the same thing or are they two distinctly different entities?” The majority of Islāmic scholars agree that the *nafs* (soul) and the *rūḥ* (spirit) are two names for one and the same thing. However, others maintain that they are two different entities.²³ The latter is not a tenable position because it lacks clear, unequivocal delineations of these two terms from the texts of the Qur’ān and the sunnah. Rather, it is a result of a misunderstanding of the terminology in these texts and personal conjecture. This is amply illustrated in the following two examples cited in detail by Ibn al-Qayyim.²⁴

One group, consisting of some ḥadīth scholars, jurists and Sūfis, states that “the *rūḥ* is other than the *nafs*.” Muqātil bin Sulaymān explains this view as follows: “Man has life [*ḥayāh*], a spirit [*rūḥ*] and a soul [*nafs*]. When he sleeps, his *nafs*- with which he senses and understands things -emerges from his body; however, it doesn’t completely separate from the physical body. Rather, it extends from it, radiating outward like a cable. While both life and the *rūḥ* remain in his body (being the two means by which he breathes as well as tosses and turns during sleep), man sees visions by means of the *nafs* which emerges from him. When he is about to awaken, his *nafs* returns to him faster than the blinking of an eye.

²³ See Ibn al-Ālūsī’s *Jalāl al-‘Aynayn*, pp. 142-143 and al-Safārīnī’s *Lawāmi’ al-Anwār*, vol. 2, pp. 31-32.

²⁴ For a more detailed account of various contradictory opinions, see *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*, pp. 296-297.

The Death Experience

Both the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet (ﷺ) describe death, something all animate creatures must experience. The Qur'ān states:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ

“Every soul will taste death.”³⁸

Although the term “*nafs*” is used for the soul in this verse, the intended meaning is: “Every creature possessing a soul must die,” as will be shown later.

Hardships and Agonies

In the following Qur'ānic verse, Allāh, the Exalted, informs us of the agonies of death.

وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنْتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ

“And the agony of death comes, in truth; that is what you wished to avoid.”³⁹

In this verse the phrase “*sakratul mawt*” (literally, “the drunkenness of death”) is used to indicate the swoon of death. This phrase implies that every dying person must experience some pain and torment.⁴⁰

³⁸ Sūrah *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:185.

³⁹ Sūrah *Qāf*, 50:19.

⁴⁰ See al-Alusi's *Rūḥ al-Ma'ani*, vol. 26 p. 182 and al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 17, p. 12.

Authentic narrations of the Prophet (ﷺ) also confirm this fact, as related in the following ḥadith:

عن عائشة أن رسول الله (ﷺ) كانت بين يديه ركوة أو علبة فيها ماء، فجعل يدخل يديه في الماء، فيمسح بهما وجهه ويقول: لا إله إلا الله إن للموت سكرات. ثم نصب يده فجعل يقول: في الرفيق الأعلى. حتى قبض ومالت يده.

'Ā'ishah related. “[On the occasion of his approaching death], Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) had a small vessel of water placed before him. He began to dip his hands in the water, and wiping his face with them, he said, ‘There is no one worthy of worship but Allāh! Verily, death brings with it agonies!’ Then he raised his hand up and kept repeating, ‘In the most exalted company’⁴¹ until his soul was taken and his hand fell limp.”⁴²

And in another narration:

لقد رأيت رسول الله (ﷺ) وهو بالموت وعنده قدح فيه ماء، وهو يدخل يده في القدح ثم يمسح وجهه بالماء ثم يقول: اللهم أعني على سكرات الموت.

'Ā'ishah reported. “Truly, I saw Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) when death approached him. He had a container with some water in it into which he dipped his hand and then wiped his face. Then he said, ‘O Allāh, help me to overcome the agonies of death.’”⁴³

⁴¹ The Prophet (ﷺ) had been given a choice by Allāh between eternal life and the company of Paradise (i.e., the prophets, their followers, the martyrs and the righteous). The statement quoted was the expression of his choice.

⁴² Related by al-Bukhārī.

⁴³ Related and authenticated by al-Hākim.

From what has preceded, it is clear that death causes agony and hardship. Even the Prophet (ﷺ) prayed to Allāh to help him overcome the great test placed upon him. In his treatise on the circumstances of the dead and the Hereafter, al-Qurṭubī emphasized this point. He said, “If such great agonies were experienced upon death by the prophets, the messengers and the pious believers, how can the likes of ourselves be heedless about it - too busy and neglectful in preparing for it? Two benefits can be derived from the occurrence of such agonies and hardships to the chosen prophets (Allāh’s blessings be upon them all). The first one is information given to man of the extent of death’s pain and calamity. Although one may witness a person’s death, one may not observe any fearful movements. Without knowing what the dead person really experienced, one may assume that the person died with ease because it appeared that he expired effortlessly. Thus, man can be sure of the agonies faced by the dying [other than the martyrs] because even though the prophets were especially honoured by Allāh, they still [experienced and] informed us about the fierce pangs of death. The second benefit is the enlightenment of man as to why the beloved of Allāh - the prophets and the messengers - were put through such harsh circumstances. Surely Allāh, the Powerful and Mighty, is capable of alleviating them of all such pain. However, in one of al-Bukhārī’s narrations, the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that the most severely tested are the prophets of Allāh, then the most righteous of other men and then those lesser in degree of righteousness. Thus, even though He could have eased their agonies and lightened the pangs of death, Allāh wished to test them in order to complete their virtues and to raise their degrees [in heaven]. However, it is important to understand that Allāh did not intensify their agony to a point greater than that inflicted upon sinful, disobedient people. The torment that the disobedient must bear is a punishment and a retribution for their sinful conduct. Therefore, there is no comparison between the two.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Paraphrased from al-Qurṭubī’s *al-Tadhkirah fī Ahwāl al-Mawtā wa Umūr al-Ākhirah*, p. 22.

The Appearance of Satan

From the preceding, it is obvious that death is a time of great stress, fear and pain for all. There is no doubt that Satan comes even to the dying believer. He is ever present, tempting and troubling one during life, even up to the very point when one’s soul exits the body. This continuous harassment is indicated in an authentic ḥadīth:

إن الشيطان يحضر أحدكم عند كل شيء من شأنه حتى يحضره عند طعامه.

The Prophet (ﷺ) stated: “Verily, Satan comes to you at all circumstances and affairs of your life, even at the time of eating.”⁴⁵

It is commonly related that Satan comes to the dying person in the form of certain loved ones, such as his parents, brothers and sisters, friends, etc. and encourages him to die as a Jew or Christian. However, it should be clarified that these “narrations” are not based on authentically related prophetic traditions,⁴⁶ but rather, they are stories of people’s experiences. Al-Qurṭubī mentions some of these accounts in his *al-Tadhkirah*,⁴⁷ stating, “It is said that when

⁴⁵ Related by Muslim.

⁴⁶ Satan’s coming in the form of loved ones is mentioned in various Islāmic writings as though it was related from the Prophet (ﷺ) in authentic traditions. For example, see Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s *Kashf ‘Ulūm al-Ākhirah* as mentioned by al-Qurṭubī in his *al-Tadhkirah*, p. 33. It is claimed that al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā’i related the following tradition in which the Prophet (ﷺ) is alleged to have said: “Verily, Satan comes to a person at the time of death and says to him, ‘Die as a Jew; die as a Christian.’” However, a careful search of these two compilations as well as other ḥadīth literature (such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, al-Dārquṭnī, al-Dārimī, Mālik and others) did not reveal the existence of such a prophetic tradition.

⁴⁷ See pp. 33-34.

The Soul's Abode Between Death and the Resurrection

The scholars of Islām, even the theologians of *ahl al-sunnah*, differed widely on the issue of the soul's abode between death and the Resurrection. The existence of vast numbers of narrations relating to this subject is the main reason for such differences. These traditions are of varying degrees of authenticity, and many of them are weak or forged. Therefore, in order to ensure that only the authentic narrations are applied and to arrive at the correct view on this issue, a careful, critical sifting of the pertinent ḥadith literature in this area is absolutely essential. Furthermore, a synthesis of the various textual material from both the Qur'ān and the authentic sunnah must be completed in order to arrive at a comprehensive, all encompassing view of the matter. Such a method will remove the seeming confusion due to apparently conflicting reports. The various views regarding this question will be analyzed along with the proof used to support them, and finally, preference will be given to the view which is supported by the most authentic texts and sound reasoning.

Various Opinions²¹⁶

1. Generally, it is said that the souls of the believers are in Paradise whether they be martyrs or not. However, they may

²¹⁶ See Ibn al-Qayyim's *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*, pp. 133-134 and *Lawāmi' al-Anwār*, vol. 2, pp. 46-47.

be temporarily prevented from entering it due to major sins or an outstanding debt - unless Allāh accepts them with mercy and forgiveness. This view was held by the two illustrious companions, Abū Hurayrah and 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar, among others.

2. As related by his son 'Abdullāh, Imām Aḥmad claimed that the souls of the disbelievers are in the Fire, while the souls of the believers are in Paradise.
3. Similar to the previous one, another view states that the believers' souls are in *'illiyyūn* (the paradisaal heights of the seventh heaven), while the souls of the disbelievers are in *sijjīn* (the seventh earth) below the armies of *Iblīs*.
4. A group of the companions and their followers (*tābi' ūn*) held that the believers' souls are with Allāh and left it at that.
5. Another group of scholars maintained that the souls of the believers are at the door of Paradise, and there comes to them its fragrant breezes, bounties and pleasures. But according to Mujāhid, only the soul of the martyr is at the door of Paradise.
6. Imām Mālik stated, "It has reached me that the *rūḥ* is free to roam wherever it wants."
7. Another group of scholars claimed that the souls of the dead are in the expanses of their graves.
8. Yet another view, which partially resembles numbers three and seven, stated, "The believers' souls are in a *"barzakḥ"* (zone) of the earth, moving about as they please, whereas the souls of the disbelievers are in *sijjīn*.
9. A different view claimed that the souls of the believers are on the right-hand side of Ādam, while the souls of the disbelievers are on his left.